Outreach Programs Handbook

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SECTION 1 — INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The Alberta *School Act* (RSA 2000) gives the right of access to education to eligible persons who are 6 years of age or older and younger than 19 years of age, and it permits school boards to acquire or develop and offer programs to meet the needs of these students. Outreach Programs are particularly effective in meeting the needs of some students.

The purpose of this *Outreach Program Handbook* is to help school jurisdictions (administrators, teachers, trustees), parents and community members understand the expectations and practices related to Outreach Programs.

WHAT IS AN OUTREACH PROGRAM?

History and Definition

According to Billie E. J. Housego (1999), "teachers in innovative, alternative schools and programs have attempted," for more than 30 years, "to meet the needs of students who either cannot or will not pursue their education in traditional high schools". In Alberta, a few educators began as early as 20 years ago to attempt to meet the needs of these students.

Housego states that "The term outreach, which applies to community outreach and outreach counseling and refers generally to 'efforts to increase the availability and utilization of services, especially through direct intervention and interaction with the target population,' has been in use since 1974 (Educational Resources Information Centre Thesaurus, 1997)." (Housego, p.86) The use of the term "outreach" in Alberta emerged in the mid 1990s. It is preceded by the term "storefront" school, and a number of Outreach Programs still retain "storefront" in their name. Efforts to establish Outreach Programs in Alberta have increased significantly since targeted provincial funding commenced in 1995/1996.

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Characteristics of Outreach Programs

All students in Alberta have the right to an education, and school jurisdictions have the responsibility to provide an appropriate education to their students. For various reasons, some students find that regular school programs and services do not meet their needs. To encourage these students to continue and complete their education, Alberta Learning provides funding for Outreach Programs.

In the early years of Outreach Programs, the focus was on at-risk students. That focus continues to be the major emphasis, but in recent years the focus has broadened considerably to include:

- students who want to take their full high school program at the Outreach Program
- students in grade 12 who need only a few more courses for graduation
- students who are working and cannot fit a regular high school program into their schedules
- students who have failed, been otherwise unsuccessful in high school or have dropped out
- adults who want to complete their high school diploma
- pregnant and parenting teens
- students who have been or are involved with drugs, criminal activity and/or sexual abuse
- students who have been bullied or who, for other reasons, find learning difficult because of large classes and congested schools.
- students who have had discipline problems and/or have been expelled from junior or senior high school
- students facing mental or physical health issues such as anxiety, depression or other medical problems
- students who have literacy challenges or whose critical thinking skills are limited
- students who are so heavily involved in sports or fine arts that they are unable to attend classes full time
- students who, because of their religion, find that regular schools do not meet their needs.

Outreach Programs operate as stand-alone facilities using a variety of approaches to meet the individual needs of students and help students complete their high school diploma. For example, the student and teacher in an Outreach Program school may jointly plan an individualized program to meet the educational needs of that student in a safe, non-threatening environment.

All Outreach Programs must provide students with educational services that are in addition to distance learning courses and materials. Some examples of additional services are personal and career counselling, conflict resolution and anger management techniques, time management and study skills, parenting skills, and learning strategies.

Each Outreach Program is unique in that it is designed to meet the individual needs of its students. The performance of students also varies based on their abilities, needs and goals.

Provincial Legislation and Requirements

The Outreach Program in Alberta is supported by two sections of the current *School Act*:

Right of access to education

60 (1) Every individual

(a) who at September 1 in a year is 6 years of age or older and younger than 19 years of age, and

(b) who is

(i) a Canadian citizen,

(ii) lawfully admitted to Canada for permanent residence,

(iii) a child of a Canadian citizen, or

(iv) a child of an individual who is lawfully admitted to Canada for permanent or temporary residence

is entitled to have access in that school year to an education program in accordance with this *Act*.

(2) A board may permit an individual

(a) who at September 1 in a year is younger than 6 years of age or older than 18 years of age, and

(b) who complies with subsection (1)(b),

to have access in that year to an education program in accordance with this *Act*.

Powers of boards

60 (1) A board must

(a) establish policies respecting the provision of educational services and programs; ...

(2) A board may

(a) subject to section 39 and the regulations, develop, acquire or offer courses or programs;

(b) subject to section 39 and the regulations, develop or acquire instructional materials for use in programs or in schools.

Section 45 of the *School Act* requires school boards that operate schools to provide appropriate educational programs for each of their students. A school board may choose to establish an Outreach Program to meet the needs of some of its students, provided it also continues to offer regular educational programs for the rest of its students. Before establishing an Outreach Program, the school board must pass a motion granting approval for members of its staff to offer an Outreach Program. A number of additional steps need to be taken in establishing the program (see page 9 of this handbook for a checklist).

Outreach Programs in Alberta must meet certain requirements. An Outreach Program must:

- be operated as a stand-alone facility. The site and facilities must meet Alberta building, health and safety standards for school buildings.

- be covered by the school board's liability insurance. The school board must ensure that its liability insurance is extended to protect the board, its employees, students and third parties, as required.
- have written policies and procedures for the program (see Appendix A, pages 31-32, for a sample policy statement). A school board operating an Outreach Program must develop, keep current and implement written policies and procedures for the program. Policies must deal with student eligibility, attendance, program, performance, evaluation and administration.
- have special services. The program must provide students with educational services that are in addition to distance learning courses and materials. These services may include courses on such topics as parenting, personal and career counselling, conflict resolution, anger management, time management, study skills and learning strategies.
- provide students with access to instruction by a certificated teacher during the instructional day. Depending on the level of enrolment, the school may have one teacher who is responsible for all courses or a number of full- or part-time teachers, each with a subject area.

Benefits and Challenges

Outreach Programs are, by definition and practice, different from regular school programs. The differences result in both benefits and challenges for the students, school staff and school jurisdiction. The following are comments made by Outreach participants.

Benefits for Students

Benefits for students, as reported by Outreach participants, include the following.

- Students are able to follow a customized curriculum. All students work toward obtaining their high school diploma, but they are able to choose which courses they take and when they take them.
- Students work at their own pace. Although the school may set minimum expectations for student progress, such as two modules per week, students are given a great deal of flexibility to work at the best pace for their ability, their motivation and their personal, home and work situations. This flexibility and potential for a reduced workload are what attract many students back to school and enable them to complete their diploma requirements.
- Attendance expectations are significantly reduced. In the most flexible school situations, students are required to be present for only one or two hours per week in order for teachers to monitor their progress and deal with the students' personal needs. In other situations, students may be required to attend school for 10 or more hours per week.
- The Outreach Program may have extended hours. Some Outreach Programs cater to students who have daytime work schedules or who attend another school during the day. They do so by extending the school day on one or more days of the week. For example, the school may open later in the

morning and stay open later in the afternoon, may be open one evening a week and/or may be open during the summer.

- Students can take some high school courses while working. Although regular high schools may allow students to take a reduced workload, an Outreach Program permits the student to take just one course at a time, if that is all the student can manage.
- Teachers may be more likely to know the students' names and students believe that teachers care about them as individuals. Outreach students are quick to point out that they feel differently in an Outreach Program. Teachers often report that they are concerned with students' personal lives as well as with how they are performing in academic courses.
- Teachers and other staff often make a conscious choice to be there. Many teachers who teach in an Outreach Program are quick to state that they enjoy the environment and would not like to return to a regular school.
- There are low student/teacher ratios. Many Outreach Programs limit the number of students per certificated teacher. Because of flexible scheduling and limited attendance requirements, the student/teacher ratio is quite low at most times in the school day. This means that students have a learning environment and plenty of individualized assistance that meets their learning needs.
- Students have access to specialized services, such as school-developed courses that are designed to meet some of the students' personal needs. Courses may deal with such topics as parenting, personal and career counselling, conflict resolution, anger management, time management, study skills and learning strategies.
- Students have less pressure while completing their schoolwork. Fewer courses and more flexible timelines make it easier for students to complete coursework.
- Students have a second chance to succeed in obtaining an education. Some students have had difficulty in their previous school(s). Attending an Outreach Program gives them a fresh opportunity and the chance to begin again in new surroundings.

Benefits for Staff

Benefits for staff, as reported by Outreach participants, include the following.

- There is a low student/teacher ratio because the attendance requirement for students is lower, so teachers are able to focus more on individual students.
- Results are evident. Teachers frequently see results in a short time because students are focused on fewer courses and are motivated to complete them.
- Discipline problems among students are greatly reduced and frequently nonexistent. Formerly disruptive students who start attending the Outreach Program discover that they are in a new environment that is designed for their benefit, their course load is reduced, and staff have closer contact with them and take an interest in them. These factors often have a positive effect on students.

- Staff have a chance to work with students beyond the academic focus. In an Outreach Program, teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to work with students in addressing their behaviour, mental health issues, physical health issues such as pregnancy, job situations and personal relationships. These matters frequently arise during discussions of academic topics, during specialized courses or in free discussions. In some Outreach Programs, additional formal counselling is referred to off-site specialists.
- Staff have a chance to assist students to realize goals and begin to believe in their own abilities. Teachers work with students one-on-one and, through discussion and support, show that the goals students have are possible to attain. When students can and do meet their goals, they start to believe in themselves.
- Staff have an opportunity to change students' negative school experiences into positive ones. Some students find their time in a regular school to be a stressful and negative experience. These students often find that the environment in an Outreach Program is positive and supportive, resulting in a change in their attitude toward school.

Challenges for Students

The challenge for students, as reported by Outreach participants, is how to accomplish the following.

- Develop self-discipline as learners. In most Outreach Programs, students have fewer restrictions on their time due to lower attendance requirements and course load. In the most relaxed settings, students are required to attend the school for only a few hours per week. To be successful, students must acquire the motivation and self-discipline to complete course work on their own. Becoming independent learners is the key to success in Outreach Programs.
- Develop effective time management skills. One of the major challenges for students is learning to make the most of all the flexibility and time that is available. Since they are responsible for their own learning, it is essential for them to acquire skill in managing their time effectively.
- Overcome past experiences with school. Outreach staff challenge students who have had negative experiences with school to change their views in an Outreach Program. It takes time for students with a history of problems to believe that they can succeed and that flexibility in expectations and timelines can make their school experience more pleasant and successful.
- Deal with a lack of parental support. Where parents are absent or are disinterested, students sometimes feel that no one cares or that the negative attitude of their parents is sufficient reason for them to give up. Overcoming this view takes time and the support of others, including staff members in the Outreach Program.
- Overcome past and present social challenges. Students who are facing this challenge need a strong will and perseverance in order to break ties with friends who are exhibiting unacceptable behaviours, overcome the negative attitude that may be present in their neighbourhoods and give up bad habits such as drugs. Success in school is one motivation to change.

- Establish realistic short- and long-term goals that fit their interests and abilities. Students need help from staff members to review and adjust their goals so the students can achieve them.

Challenges for Staff

The challenge for staff, as reported by Outreach participants, is how to accomplish the following.

- Balance their investment of time, talents and energy into the personal lives of students. While helping students deal with their personal issues is satisfying for many teachers, it comes with increased demand in terms of time and energy. Staff may find that students need their help even beyond the school walls or the school day.
- Keep students motivated to attend school and remain committed to their goals. Constant positive reinforcement and support is required to assist students to stay motivated and committed. Such support is rewarding, but exhausting for staff.
- Manage the heavy load for marking assignments.
- Provide subject expertise in all or many areas.
- Handle the feeling of isolation from the supports provided within the traditional educational setting.
- Assist students in becoming more responsible for their own actions.
- Set up a network with each student's parent(s), where appropriate.
- Address the diverse physical and emotional needs of students in order to help the students meet the expectations for significant academic progress.
- Act as a teacher, counsellor, social worker, and advocate for so many students.

Challenges for School Jurisdictions

The challenge for school jurisdictions operating Outreach Programs, as reported by Outreach participants, is how to accomplish the following.

- Allocate the per pupil funding, as it is sometimes insufficient to operate an Outreach Program due to the extra services and supports needed.
- Keep track of students, as this takes much more time and effort than it does in regular schools.
- Successfully select appropriate staff members who are well suited to the Outreach situation.
- Successfully justify the value of an Outreach Program to the community.
- Accommodate high rent/lease costs in communities with high growth.

SECTION 2 — DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Planning for Success

A school board that decides to offer an Outreach Program should take the following steps.

1. Pass a motion granting approval to operate an Outreach Program.
2. Complete an Application to Offer an Outreach Program, Form 02AL 1.1.1, by May 31 for the following school year and submit it to the Director of the Special Programs Branch. The application must include a plan about how the program will be offered.
3. Receive approval from the Director of the Special Programs Branch prior to commencing the program for the first time. Once granted, program approval is ongoing.
4. Ensure that the site and facilities where the Outreach Program will be offered are a stand-alone facility that meets Alberta building, health and safety standards for school buildings.
5. Develop, keep current and implement written policies and procedures for the Outreach Program.
6. The Outreach Program shall be authorized by a board motion. The program must use the Alberta Learning *Programs of Study*. The board may include a motion that endorses the use of locally developed junior or senior high courses as well.
7. Ensure the program provides students with educational services that are in addition to distance learning courses and materials.
8. Ensure that students have access to instruction by a certificated teacher during the instructional day.
9. Include Outreach Program operations and results in the jurisdiction's *Annual Education Results Reports* and *Three-year Education Plans*.

Available Resources

When planning an Outreach Program, school jurisdiction staff may find it useful to:

- develop an inventory of community resources and services
- review the necessary strengths and interests of school staff before assigning or hiring staff for the program
- decide on courses and special services to be offered
- find an appropriate site that is close to bus routes, away from existing schools, in an area where students live, and easily accessible to work places
- create a joint operation with another school district, such as public and separate districts in the same community, if the program is in an area where student numbers are low.

TIMEFRAME

When planning an Outreach Program, there are a number of steps that need to be taken which deal with meeting provincial requirements, board actions, actions by school administrators, program, facilities, funding, staffing, expectations of students, assessment and evaluation, and communication. The following actions will be necessary in most school jurisdictions.

TASK (Some may occur simultaneously)	LEADER	TIMELINE	BUDGET
Develop a proposal to create an Outreach Program.			
Present proposal to school board and receive approval.			
Board passes motion to have an Outreach Program.			
Draft vision and mission statements.			
Develop timelines for operationalizing program.			
Develop description of program to be offered.			
Investigate and locate appropriate site/facility.			
Complete leasing arrangements for school.			
Arrange for health and safety inspections.			
Research nature of staff needed for program.			
Investigate sources of appropriate staff.			
Publicize positions and invite applications.			
Review applications carefully to ensure appropriate staff are hired.			
Communicate plans to other school staff and establish effective relationships.			
Establish conditions for referring students to program.			
Determine costs of lease, utilities, insurance, staff, resources, equipment, etc.			
Meet with community agencies and establish roles and relationships.			
Establish roles of staff, parents, and students.			
Develop budget for Year 1.			
Board approves both start-up and ongoing budgets.			
Set student registration dates.			
Advertise program in local media.			
Develop/acquire special courses to be offered by program.			
Acquire distance learning material for regular courses.			
Establish attendance requirements.			
Establish performance expectations for students.			
Send proposal to Director of Special Programs Branch before May 31.			

Outreach Program Proposal

When a school jurisdiction decides to create an Outreach Program, someone in the jurisdiction will be assigned the task of developing a proposal for consideration by the board of trustees. That person may be a member of the central office staff, a potential principal of the school or some other appropriate staff member. The person developing the proposal should facilitate discussion of the following topics:

- the name of the Outreach Program
- a description of the Outreach Program, including its goals, relationship to the mission of the school system, etc.
- a description of the students to be served, such as students who have left school early but may be motivated to return, working students, adults, students with special needs, students with timetable conflicts in their regular school, etc.
- an outline of the grades to be offered in the school – senior high, junior high or a combination
- the anticipated enrolment
- a general description of the desirable location(s) for the school, including such considerations as proximity to bus lines, easy access for students who work, and distance from existing schools
- the type of programming that would be offered, such as Alberta Distance Learning (ADL) courses
- staff requirements, such as certificated teachers, teacher assistants, secretaries, administrative support and counsellors
- funding considerations, including sources of funding, and estimated expenditures for facility, utilities, resources and equipment
- the starting date for school operation
- the method of evaluation that will be used for students and for the program.

Outreach Program Application

Once the school board has approved an Outreach Program by passing a motion at a duly constituted meeting, the board must submit an Application to Operate a new Outreach Program, Form 02AL 1.1.1, to Alberta Learning for approval. Prior to submission of the application, the board must:

- appoint a principal of the Outreach Program
- identify the building that will house the school
- carry out inspections to ensure health, safety and building standards are met
- establish the program for the school, including how the program will be delivered
- set expectations for student attendance, performance and achievement.

The application form must be submitted to the Director of the Special Programs Branch by May 31 of the year in which the program is to be introduced.

Implementation Plan

After the board and Alberta Learning have approved the Outreach Program, there are a number of actions that must be taken to operationalize the program.

(Some of these actions will occur simultaneously, so this list should not be considered to be chronological.)

Prepare the school site for students and staff

Before Alberta Learning can approve the program, the school site must be inspected to ensure that health, safety and building standards are met. After approval, the board should ensure that the school site is appropriately prepared.

- Renovations may be necessary to accommodate the space requirements of staff and students.
- Furnishings need to be acquired and installed. These may include desks, tables, computer tables, chairs, cupboards, shelving, sinks, filing cabinets and playpens.
- Other equipment needs to be purchased and installed. Necessary equipment may include computers, printers, telephones, fax machine, photocopier, television, stove, fridge, dishwasher, washer and dryer. Enhancement of facilities to enable the integration of technology may be necessary and should be addressed prior to installation of equipment.

Develop/acquire program materials and resources

- Many Outreach Programs use ADL materials in most subject areas. Arrangements should be made to acquire sufficient materials. A decision must be made about whether assignments will be marked at the distance learning office or at the school.
- Specialized courses in areas such as learning strategies, time management, conflict resolution, study skills and parenting skills, need to be developed or acquired if the Outreach Program is planning to offer them.
- In addition to course materials, textual materials and resources to support the curriculum also need to be acquired.
- Reference materials and other resources, including computer software, need to be acquired.

Hire staff

- The most critical component of establishing an Outreach Program is hiring staff who will meet the needs of students and the goals of the school. The kind of people to consider hiring are those who have great empathy, care about and support students, are flexible and are able to counsel students needing help. Staff should be able to deal with students who may be involved with drugs, criminal activity and/or sexual abuse.

- Teachers should have a wide range of knowledge and experience with numerous subject areas.
- Teachers should be team players.
- Teacher assistants should have similar personal characteristics as teachers. Because they spend considerable time with students, they should have the same supportive skills.
- Secretaries and other support personnel will benefit the school if, in addition to their technical skills, they share the personal characteristics of other staff.

Meet with community agencies

- Establishing a liaison with community agencies and arranging for their involvement when needed is important to the success of the Outreach Program. Community agencies involved could include the police, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), social services such as Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), health unit nurses and mental health workers. Representatives of these groups can assist the school in offering workshops as well as helping individual students in need.

Meet with principals of other schools

- It is important to meet with principals of other schools, especially those whose students may become students in the Outreach Program, to establish communication channels and to agree on conditions under which students may move from one school to the other. Is co-registration desirable? In some districts, students currently registered in a regular school are not accepted in the Outreach Program unless they have the consent of the principal of the regular school. The goal of working with other principals is to set up the structure that will benefit students the most.

Develop a vision and mission statement

- Since it is important to have a focus, developing vision and mission statements is worthwhile. Involving staff in the process may add to the value. The goals included in the original proposal to establish the program may need to be revised based on suggestions from the board, staff and community.

Develop a budget

- Develop a budget for commencing operations of the program.
- Develop a separate budget for the ongoing operation of the school.

Develop a statement of roles for participants

- To help clarify the focus of staff and others and to develop understanding of the roles of everyone involved, it is useful to have a statement of roles for the principal, teachers, teacher assistants, students, parents, central office personnel and school trustees.

Advertise the program and recruit students

- Promotion of the Outreach Program brings understanding by the community. It also brings students to the school. One Outreach administrator states, "Promotion brings acceptance". One way to attract students might be to attempt to make contact with each student in the district who has dropped out of school in the last two years. Contact may be done through phone calls, letters and/or home visits.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Each school jurisdiction is required to submit a *Three-Year Education Plan* and an *Annual Education Results Report* to Alberta Learning. These two reports, along with the results of achievement testing and diploma examinations, usually comprise a jurisdiction's basic accountability plan. Outreach Programs contribute to and are a part of this accountability, in particular high school completion.

In addition, section 20 of the *School Act* requires principals to evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered at their schools. In Outreach Programs, measures may focus on areas such as:

- rate of course completion
- rate of graduation
- diploma examination results
- attendance rates to illustrate students' desire to attend (this focus may not be appropriate for some Outreach Programs)
- the percentage of students meeting their timelines for completion of modules and courses
- the degree of positiveness in school atmosphere
- student feedback designed to highlight attitude, behaviour and success
- parent feedback with respect to students' attitude, behaviour and success, and surveys of parent satisfaction, which may be done by incorporating questions in an annual survey by the jurisdiction
- student improvement in social skills, appearance, etc.
- the number of students helped by the Outreach Program who graduate from other schools
- the number of students who stay in school as a result of the Outreach Program
- anecdotal descriptions of successes with students who have been helped by the Outreach Program in ways that may not be measurable, such as students who have not passed many courses, but have been helped to overcome emotional, social or psychological challenges
- personal reflections on successes given by parents, students and staff.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

The school jurisdiction and, later, the Outreach Program, should have a plan to communicate about the introduction and operation of the Outreach Program. Parents, community and other schools should be aware of the purpose of the program and the steps being taken to initiate it. School location, potential students and unique characteristics of the program should be articulated to the public. As the Outreach Program comes closer to opening, the vision, mission and goals statements should be communicated. For example, the mission might include these ideas: "the mission of XYZ Outreach Program is to promote academic performance, career education, improved attitude and acceptable behaviour in a safe and caring environment".

Goals that could be communicated might include:

- increase student confidence and motivation for learning
- improve student achievement in academic subjects and completion of diploma requirements
- improve student self-discipline and independence in learning
- improve student learning strategies
- provide one-on-one assistance to students in a positive learning environment
- provide program flexibility to students.

Other things that could be communicated to parents, the community and others might include:

- performance results (number of diplomas awarded, courses completed)
- enrolment figures (including changes over time)
- resources available in the school and community
- partnerships with community agencies, businesses, etc.
- regular and special activities in the school and community
- success stories and celebrations.

SPECIAL NEEDS

According to *Policy 1.6.2 (Special Education)*, students with special needs are:

(1) students described in sections 47 and 48 of the *School Act* as being in need of special education programs because of their behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics; or
(2) students who may require specialized health care services; or
(3) students who are gifted and talented.

The Policy Statement also states that school authorities are responsible for the:

- identification, assessment and placement of exceptional students;
- development and implementation of Individualized Program Plans (IPP); and
- evaluation of the individual progress of exceptional students.

When an Outreach Program considers accepting a student with special needs, these obligations need to be reviewed. If the Outreach Program decides to accept a student with special needs, the Outreach Program must supply all necessary services, including Individualized Program Plans (IPPs).

Students with special needs may find success in Outreach Programs for a variety of reasons, including that:

- the learning is individually paced
- there is a caring and supportive atmosphere
- there is a flexible work schedule
- students may have access to teacher assistants, counsellors and youth care workers
- students have access to one-on-one tutoring by teachers.

Most students with special needs who attend Outreach Programs have mild/moderate disabilities such as learning disabilities or emotional and/or behavioural disabilities. Some Outreach Programs have teacher assistants to provide help to students with special needs.

SECTION 3 — ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(as identified by Outreach practitioners)

When an Outreach Program begins operation, it is best to work and consult collaboratively to establish appropriate and acceptable roles and responsibilities for the various participants. Staff may begin with roles and responsibilities that are assigned. For example, the *School Act* addresses the required duties of principals and teachers, but there are additional roles and responsibilities. These can be identified over time and consensus can be reached on the best person(s) or position(s) to carry out the expectations.

Below are listed some key roles of the major participants in Outreach Programs, based on the opinions of Outreach practitioners.

Role of Students

In most cases, students freely choose to attend an Outreach Program. Once that choice is made, the student needs to meet the expectations of the school. Since the primary purpose of an Outreach Program is to help students acquire a high school diploma, the student's role is to focus on that goal.

The *School Act* requires the student to be diligent in pursuing the student's studies, attend school regularly and punctually, co-operate fully with everyone authorized by the board to provide education programs and other services, comply with the rules of the school, account to the student's teachers for the student's conduct and respect the rights of others.

In addition, the Outreach student:

- sets learning goals to guide his/her studies
- works on and completes enrolled courses at an agreed-upon pace and within a timeframe that is reasonable for him/her
- meets the attendance requirements of the program
- is or becomes self-motivated
- exhibits appropriate behaviour.

Role of Parents

Outreach Programs exist because some students need a different learning environment. To be supportive, parents may choose to:

- keep in regular contact with the program to determine the progress of their son or daughter
- encourage and enable their son or daughter to attend school when needed and to complete his/her school work
- attend special events at the school, such as pancake breakfasts and graduation ceremonies
- volunteer to assist and support teachers in the Outreach Program

- attend parent-teacher interviews.

Parents of a student with special needs who is attending an Outreach Program need to sign the student's IPP.

Role of School Council

When an Outreach Program operates as a program that is associated directly with a "parent" school, there is no requirement to establish a school council. However, in Outreach Programs that operate as schools, the attempt to establish a school council must be made. Where it is possible to establish a school council, the work of the school and its credibility in the community is enhanced. School councils provide a sounding board for new school initiatives and assist the school in communicating to the community.

The school council's main role is to help ensure the best education for the students in the Outreach Program. As a part of this role, a school council:

- works with the principal and staff to develop new programs that are consistent with the goals of the Outreach Program
- provides input to the principal and staff regarding the community's expectations
- assists in promoting the school and its programs.

Role of Community

The community can:

- be aware of the Outreach Program and the contribution it makes to the community
- provide expertise to staff and students, when appropriate
- attend special events sponsored by the Outreach Program
- provide support to the Outreach Program by volunteering and/or promoting the program
- offer employment opportunities to Outreach students.

Role of Teachers and Paraprofessional Staff

The *School Act* requires teachers to provide instruction competently, teach courses of study, promote goals and standards, encourage and foster learning, evaluate students, maintain order and discipline and carry out any other duties that may be assigned.

In an Outreach Program, these roles and responsibilities frequently take on a different perspective. In addition, the teacher:

- is a listener
- is a counsellor to students
- fosters the development of independent learning and self-discipline among students
- has a broad knowledge of curriculum and instruction

- is flexible, non-traditional, innovative, resilient and a risk taker
- has a philosophy that includes a belief in Outreach students and the ability and potential in each person
- treats Outreach students as people and is empathetic, tolerant, patient, accepting and fair
- is a good communicator, both in groups and one-on-one, with students, parents and others
- is a team player who accepts the common goals and philosophy of the Outreach Program, but also is able to connect with students who require specialized supports or services
- has the stamina and ability to deal with constant change
- is able to deal with the heavy load of marking assignments.

Paraprofessional staff are listeners and caring, supportive adults. They may counsel and/or tutor students. Other roles include acting as receptionists, accountants, record keepers, file clerks, disciplinarians and library technicians.

Teacher assistants may share some of the roles listed above. They also:

- assist students with special needs in their learning and their school activities; e.g., by reading exams to a student who is visually impaired or by helping a student stay focused
- provide academic support to reinforce concepts in subjects
- implement behaviour management strategies to improve learning and classroom behaviour
- supervise students on breaks
- communicate with parents and assist teachers
- provide transportation to, and information about, various community support services.

Role of Principal or Administrator

The principal or administrator has certain roles as outlined in the *School Act*. These roles include:

- providing instructional leadership
- ensuring that instruction by teachers is consistent with the Alberta Learning courses of study and other programs that may be prescribed
- evaluating or providing for the evaluation of programs
- ensuring that students have the opportunity to meet standards
- directing the management of the school
- maintaining order and discipline
- promoting co-operation between the school and the community
- supervising the evaluation of students
- evaluating teachers
- carrying out any other duties that may be assigned.

In an Outreach Program, the school principal or administrator also has the responsibility to:

- understand and support the program philosophy
- be a visionary, an experienced instructional and curriculum leader, who sees the big picture, articulates the vision to staff, and empowers them to address it
- be flexible and open to new ideas and willing to make allowances for individual differences
- be knowledgeable about policies and systems (social and jurisdictional)
- match the program to the students
- hire appropriate staff
- ensure that the program is implemented in a manner consistent with the board's expectations
- obtain necessary resources so the staff can do their jobs
- arrange appropriate professional development and learning opportunities for staff
- publicize the Outreach Program
- facilitate recruitment of students for the Outreach Program
- maintain a cooperative and harmonious environment in the school
- establish and maintain a strong network with principals of other schools, particularly with other Outreach Programs, and with community agencies affiliated with Outreach
- encourage the participation of parents in the school
- maintain frequent and ongoing contact with students and staff.

Role of External Support Agencies

External support agencies provide assistance to Outreach Programs and students. Their role varies depending on the nature of their services. The role of an agency may be to:

- provide counselling services for students – agencies such as Family and Community Support Services, Mental Health and Native Liaison
- provide financial support to students in need – agencies such as Student Finance Board and the Children's Foundation
- supervise students on parole – Probation Officers
- provide opportunities to learn about and experience work in business and industry – agencies such as Nova, Career Development and Nisku Economic Development Initiative
- support and educate pregnant teens and young mothers – agencies such as Parent's Place, Pregnancy Crisis Centre, Women's Outreach, Health Unit (Better Beginnings)
- provide special courses or workshops – agencies such as Career Development (employment skills), St. John's Ambulance (first aid) and Children's Services (independent living for teens).

Role of Central Office

The role of Central Office is to:

- work with school staff to develop the Outreach Program – define the program, identify resources and review program development issues
- make recommendations to the school board regarding approval of the new Outreach Program and subsequent changes to the program, as needed
- consider Outreach Programs in the development of jurisdictional policies
- provide support, advice and assistance to school administrators – identify resources, provide leadership training, assist in hiring, organize transportation services where necessary, and so on
- provide ongoing liaison, advice, assistance and problem resolution to community groups on behalf of the school jurisdiction
- evaluate the principal and the Outreach Program
- ensure that appropriate funding is available to the Outreach Program.

Role of Trustees

A board of trustees provides leadership and support to all schools in the jurisdiction. The trustees:

- approve the philosophy, mission statement, policies and regulations that direct school programs
- approve Outreach Programs
- allocate sufficient funds for Outreach Programs through the budgeting process
- provide support to the Outreach Program by attending functions and by working with and promoting the program.

Role of Alberta Learning

The role of Alberta Learning is to:

- approve Outreach Program applications
- develop an Outreach Program policy, if required
- consider Outreach Programs in the development of provincial policies
- provide advice and assistance to schools and jurisdictions through the Field Services Branch
- provide feedback to senior officials of Alberta Learning about the successes and challenges of Outreach Programs
- provide funding to school jurisdictions to operate Outreach Programs.

SECTION 4 — CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO STAFF

(these are the opinions of Outreach participants)

Outreach Programs have certain features that attract students and meet their needs. Some of these features have been noted in Section 1. Variations in structure, curriculum and time have a positive impact, but the major influence on program and student success is the staff and how they operate. Some of the significant characteristics of effective principals, teachers and central office staff are based on the opinions of Outreach participants and are listed below.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Professional Development — Staff

Professional development for teachers and principals of Outreach Programs is important for sustaining the positive qualities of the staff and for engaging in novel approaches to thinking, teaching and learning.

Areas that could be the focus of professional development include:

- knowledge of new or revised curriculum and resources
- new research findings in teaching and learning
- teaching techniques and strategies for working in groups and one-on-one
- effective problem-solving skills
- conflict resolution skills
- visits to other Outreach Programs and connections with staff in those programs
- in-depth knowledge and understanding of the roles of community agencies.

Learning Opportunities — Paraprofessional Staff and Parents

Paraprofessional staff and parents also need learning opportunities. Paraprofessionals work with students, meet with parents, interact with community agencies and meet the public. Learning opportunities for them might be in areas such as public relations, reception, communications, accounting, conflict resolution, budgeting, counselling, record keeping and filing.

Parents of Outreach students may benefit from learning opportunities that include a focus on listening, understanding the Outreach Program, setting goals, conflict resolution and time management.

Sources of Professional Development and Learning Opportunities

Some professional development activities are carried out within the school jurisdiction. For example, professional development days frequently are held within the school or the community and are led by staff or others who are contracted for their expertise. Other sources of professional development include:

- principals, teachers and central office staff from other school systems that have Outreach Programs
- Alberta Learning Field Services staff
- regional professional development consortia
- Alberta Teachers' Association professional development service and the Outreach Specialist Council
- universities, colleges and technical institutes
- community resource people, including people from business, industry and service agencies
- private consultants with expertise
- conferences, conventions, workshops, and seminars in other communities that are sponsored by professional organizations.

Working with External Support Agencies

Close communication and cooperation with community agencies is critical for finding the most effective ways of addressing students' needs. Outreach staff should ensure that the lines of communication between the Outreach Program and the community agencies remain open. In some communities, effective Outreach Programs encourage private businesses, industries and/or the Chamber of Commerce to provide support to the students in Outreach. The support may include:

- agency workers, such as counsellors or youth workers, assigned to the school on a part-time or full-time basis
- the provision of services by an agency in another location, such as pregnancy crisis centre or youth court
- the provision of workshops or seminars in the school for students or staff on topics such as job safety, parenting and employment opportunities.

SECTION 5 — EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

(as identified by Outreach practitioners)

Outreach practitioners have observed the following practices in various programs and consider these to be effective practices that could be used by Outreach Programs to be more successful.

Intake Process

The most effective intake processes often have these characteristics.

- Initial interview with student and parent(s). This interview answers questions such as "Why did you choose to come here? What are your goals? What kind of commitment are you willing to make? Are you planning to continue at the regular high school or to return there at some point? How many high school credits have you completed to date?"
- The process needs to include:
  - completion of all necessary registration form(s)
  - a timeline and/or contract that includes the student's name, address, phone number, name of parent/guardian, number of credits needed for diploma, list of courses and modules to be taken in each semester, and timelines for completion of each module in current semester (based on the goals expressed by the student)
  - signatures of the student, the teacher and a parent (if a parent is present at the interview)
  - delivery of a copy of the signed document to the student so he/she has a record of what was agreed
  - signature of the student on a FOIP form.
- Staff need to know the policy and recognize the implications of shared students; that is, students who also are registered in a regular high school.
- Staff need to know whether students are coded as special needs and, if so, how and when the school jurisdiction wants these students to be assessed.

Initial Course (Introduction to Outreach)

In some Outreach Programs, students take an orientation course. This course is usually shorter and easier than regular core courses and may focus on areas such as study skills or computer technology. The purpose of offering an orientation course is to:

- allow the student to take a first course and see how he/she does
- familiarize the student with the independent learning approach
- give the student the best chance of success in his/her initial endeavours
- give both the student and the teacher an idea of how the student will manage as an independent learner and how much self-discipline is exhibited by the student.

Listening to Students

One of the most effective practices of Outreach staff is listening to students. Students say that their teachers listen to their personal, social, financial and academic concerns. A successful Outreach Program is one in which staff listen to the students and act on/respond to what they hear.

Flexibility

Flexibility in an Outreach Program is an "effectiveness indicator".

- Flexible Attendance
  - All Outreach Programs have some flexibility in their attendance requirements.
  - The most effective Outreach Programs often either have no attendance requirements or have attendance requirements that are individualized. For example, if a student displays behaviour that suggests a lack of self-discipline then some attendance on a weekly basis may be required.
  - If a student has a high level of self-discipline, he/she may need to come to the school only to drop off completed work and pick up new assignments and/or to get help from the teacher.
- Flexible Hours
  - Some Outreach Programs have flexible hours for students.
  - For those students who must meet higher attendance requirements, flexible hours mean that they can attend at a time that fits with their own schedule. They may be working, involved in extra-curricular activities or have other responsibilities that place limitations on their schedule, so taking advantage of flexible hours may be the only way they can finish high school.
  - Extended hours (late afternoons and/or evenings) are one way to provide flexibility for students. When the program is of a sufficient size, flexible hours can be arranged for staff members as well.
  - Extended hours also may refer to summer school.
  - A year-round Outreach Program may be the best way to meet the needs of some students.
- Flexible Approaches
  - One-on-one tutoring gives the teacher the most opportunities for using flexible approaches with individual students whenever a flexible approach is needed.
  - Some Outreach Programs assign a staff member as a mentor/contact for each student as long as he/she attends the program. In these instances, every student has at least one person he/she can go to, not only for counselling or personal help but also for help with dealing flexibly with work or study situations.
  - All members of the Outreach staff are usually willing to give students support in times of crisis.

- One way to engage the students is to design and give them assignments based on each student's areas of interest, by taking them on tours of businesses and job areas in which they have expressed interest, by designing courses and/or by modifying CTS courses to fit the students' interests and abilities.
- Computer programs that teach higher-order thinking skills may provide another approach to learning for some students.
- Involving students in extra-curricular activities maintains their interest and motivation and adds to the flexibility of the school's program.
- A relaxed attitude toward student attire and some behaviour (e.g., allowing students to do work while listening to music with headphones) helps students to feel more comfortable.
- It may be beneficial to relax timelines for students who are dealing with emotional and social needs.

Respect for Students

Outreach Programs must treat their students with respect. When students get the message that they are important, they often no longer feel the need to prove themselves, to show off or to act out in order to be noticed.

One effective example of showing respect for students is to treat them as adults. Adults frequently use first names when addressing each other. Students place considerable importance on this approach and feel more comfortable in a school where they are allowed to use first names for teachers and others.

Celebrations

Effective Outreach Programs use celebrations to maintain a positive atmosphere and to reinforce student efforts. Some examples of celebrations include:

- social gatherings; e.g., pancake breakfasts, pyrogy dinners, barbeques, Halloween parties, monthly birthday parties
- certificates for completing courses
- chances to win a prize by putting one's name in a jar when a module is completed, or just a quiet "well done" from a teacher
- a cheery "hello" or "good morning" from staff each morning starts the celebration and makes students feel welcome.

On-site Counsellor

The presence of additional staff in the Outreach Program adds to the effectiveness of the school. Whether the additional person is a counsellor from Family and Community Support Services, a youth worker from Child Welfare, a native liaison worker from Indian and Northern Affairs or someone else, the easy access to a supportive person is helpful. In many cases, the additional staff person is on site on a part-time basis, and this regular presence is important to students.

Often the counsellor is a full-time employee of a community agency and is able to work with the program because the nature of his/her work is similar to the work he/she does in the community.

Financial Support

In many Outreach Programs, some students face financial difficulties. Some Outreach Programs have introduced effective practices to decrease the impact of financial challenges by waiving fees, providing bus tickets or providing breakfast and/or lunch programs for students in need. The money may come from the operating budget, from other sources in the community or from organizations or foundations that have been approached for help.

Student Record Management Systems

Managing student record information is challenging. The information comes from various sources and there are various staff members who receive the information and need to enter it into the system. To be most useful, the records system should be electronic, accessible to all staff, easy to use, and flexible and expandable so that it meets new needs as they arise. Lethbridge Outreach Program has developed an Outreach Student Information Management System (OSIMS), a software program that is run through a secure web browser. This software is effective because it tracks all the important aspects of the program, it saves time for everyone using it, and it is easy to use. The program tracks:

- general information — student's name, birthday, age, health care, doctor, etc.
- contact information — parent/guardian, phone numbers, address and e-mail address
- social agency worker's information — phone number, contact name, agency
- enrolment status (whether the student is currently active in a program/school — used for attendance and enrolment tracking)
- case notes — anecdotal, educational goals, follow-ups, phone calls, etc.
- assessment information — results of specialized testing
- transcript details — courses in which the student is currently enrolled, school grade, exam grade, final course grade, course completion forms, credit types, number of credits, etc.

- library services — the entire library is recorded on OSIMS, so books are checked out to students using bar code scanner
- fees — can be tracked, invoices can be created and printed
- Individualized Program Plans — students with special needs are tracked in this section.

The OSIMS program includes an administrative dimension that accommodates all of the program's tracking needs.

SECTION 6 — QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ELIGIBILITY TO ATTEND

1. **Can anyone register as an Outreach Program student?**
   No. Local school board policy must address eligibility requirements for Outreach Programs, consistent with provincial requirements.

2. **How old can students in the Outreach Program be before funding is no longer available?**
   Students in Alberta schools are eligible for funding so long as they have not reached the age of 20 years on September 1 of the school year in which they have registered.

3. **Can a school board refuse a 16-year-old student entry into an Outreach Program?**
   If sufficient space and resources are available to accommodate the student, then he/she shall be enrolled as per section 45(3) of the *School Act*. However, the *School Act* does not guarantee a student access to a particular program. If space and resources are not sufficient, a school board may refuse a student entry into an Outreach Program.

4. **Can a school board expel a student from an Outreach Program?**
   Yes. A school board can expel a student from any of its programs if, in its opinion, the student's conduct does not comply with section 12 of the *School Act* (see "Role of Students" on page 16 of this handbook). A parent, or a student if the student is over 16, may ask that the Minister of Learning review a decision to expel the student from school.

   The expulsion of a student from a particular school or program in the jurisdiction does not remove the responsibility of the board to provide an education program to the student.

PROGRAM

5. **Is an Outreach Program required to provide students with anything more than distance learning courses and materials?**
   Yes. Provincial conditions for funding require that students have access to services such as personal and career counselling, training in conflict resolution, life skills, anger management and study skills or other services which may be important to meet the needs of the students.

6. **Is it possible to prepare and use locally developed courses to address student needs like anger management, life skills, addictions or other personal and social development programs?**

   Yes. Alberta Learning's Policy on locally developed courses (#1.2.1) provides the details and processes required for locally developed courses. If a program is developed and receives approval from the local school board, it must then be referred to the Curriculum Branch, Alberta Learning, for recognition as an authorized local offering.

7. **Are students in Outreach Programs taught from the same curriculum as students in regular schools?**

   Yes. It is the responsibility of a school board to ensure that instruction provided by the teachers in an Outreach Program is consistent with Alberta Learning's *Programs of Study* and any education programs/courses prescribed, approved and/or authorized by Alberta Learning. In most Outreach Programs, the curriculum is formatted in distance learning modules to make independent learning easier. Each Outreach Program also must provide special services beyond those provided by regular schools (see page 4 for examples).

8. **Is it possible to serve junior high students with severe emotional/behavioural disabilities (code 42) through an Outreach Program?**

   It depends on the local school board's policy for admission to the program. It is possible to serve any elementary or junior high aged student in an Outreach Program, provided the student meets the terms of board policy. Students with special needs must have IPPs and must have the necessary supports made available to them. Placement of students with severe disabilities in an Outreach Program requires the written approval of the Director of the Special Programs Branch of Alberta Learning, available by phone at (780) 422-6326, or toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000.

Requirements for Outreach Programs

9. **If a portable classroom is 200 metres away from the main high school building, can it be used as an approved off-site facility?**

   Alberta Learning managers may recommend approval of such sites, if it is the intention of the Outreach Program to find a more distant location as soon as possible.

10. If an Outreach facility has moved, what needs to be done to maintain status as an approved program?

Because the safety of the facility is part of the approval process for an Outreach Program, school jurisdictions that change facilities should contact the Field Services Branch of Alberta Learning to provide change of address information and documentation that the new facility meets Alberta building, health and safety standards.

11. If a board cannot afford to put a person who has a teaching certificate in the Outreach Program full-time, is it possible to use a capable, competent teacher assistant to supervise students for part of the day?

No. Students in Outreach Programs, as in all school programs, must have access to a certificated teacher for the appropriate numbers of hours (950 hours for grades 2-9; 1000 hours for grades 10-12) as prescribed in the *Guide to Education*. Teacher assistants can, however, provide excellent service to students in Outreach Programs, provided they are acting under the direction and supervision of a certificated teacher.

12. Are school councils required for Outreach Programs?

Where the Outreach centre operates as a program associated directly with a parent school, there is no requirement to seek the establishment of a school council. In Outreach Programs that operate as independent schools, the attempt to establish a school council must be made. If there is not sufficient interest from parents, the principal may form an advisory council made up of individuals with an interest in the school.

13. Does the school code for an Outreach Program mean anything different than a code for any other school?

No. When a school code is provided, it means the Outreach School is required to comply with the legislative requirements for the operation of a school such as the appointment of a principal, the development of *Three-year Education Plans* and *Annual Education Results Reports*, the analysis and recording of student achievement, the attempt to establish a school council and so on.

14. Is there potential for differential administrative leadership at the Outreach Program?

The *School Act* requires each school under the operation of a school board to have a principal assigned to it. However, a school board may assign a principal to more than one school.

15. Must there be a principal at the Outreach Program?

Yes. Section 19 of the *School Act* requires this. A school board may determine that a "teacher-in-charge", "lead teacher", or "coordinator" may have extraordinary teacher responsibilities at the Outreach Program, according to any applicable collective agreement and the teacher's contract of employment.

APPENDIX A — SAMPLE BOARD POLICY STATEMENT

Outreach Programs - Sample Policy

School boards are required to develop policies and guidelines for Outreach Programs. Following are a sample policy and guidelines gleaned from existing policies in some jurisdictions. If a board is establishing a new Outreach Program, it may wish to consider these statements in whole or in part as it creates its own policy.

Policy

The Board believes that Outreach Programs provide education to students for whom traditional school settings are unsuitable. The primary goal of Outreach Programs is to assist students to obtain a high school diploma or equivalent in an alternative setting.

Guidelines

Eligibility

- Outreach Programs will serve the needs of students aged 12–19 years who are enrolled in grades 7–12.
- Programs will focus on those students who are unable to attend or benefit from a regular school program. These students may include at-risk students, dropouts, teenage parents, students with unique medical or health challenges, working students and others with unique needs or learning styles.
- When determining eligibility, the best interests of the individual student will be the deciding factor.
- Students may enroll in a partial program at an Outreach Program while maintaining enrolment in other courses at their local high school.

Attendance

- Attendance expectations at an Outreach Program will vary depending on the needs and circumstances of each student. These expectations are set out in the individual student's plan or contract.

Program

- Outreach Programs will follow the Alberta Learning *Programs of Study* and may include locally developed junior high and/or senior high courses.
- The program will provide students with enhanced educational services that are in addition to distance learning courses and materials. Examples of these services include: personal and career counselling, conflict resolution, time management, anger management training and study skills.
- Individual programs will be based on an assessment of individual student needs and created in consultation with the student and his/her parents.

- Students, in consultation with professional staff, will have the primary responsibility to develop and implement their own individual program.
- Outreach Programs will provide the equivalent of 25 hours of access to a certificated teacher for each credit offered.

Performance and Evaluation

- Students are expected to meet standards of performance consistent with those established by Alberta Learning.
- The pace of student learning will be set by each individual student in consultation with professional staff.
- Performance goals will be established by the student in consultation with professional staff, consistent with the student's determined potential.
- Students will be evaluated on a regular basis using appropriate evaluation approaches as well as through achievement tests and diploma examinations, when appropriate.
- If a student is not experiencing success in an Outreach Program, his/her program will be reviewed and modified, or other program options will be explored.

Administration

- Responsibility for administration of Outreach Programs will rest with the designated principal(s).
- All policies, guidelines and procedures of XYZ School Jurisdiction will be adhered to.
- Staff of Outreach Programs will work closely with external support agencies to help serve the needs of Outreach students.

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EVALUATION — OUTREACH PROGRAMS HANDBOOK

We hope this resource is helpful to you in your work with students attending Outreach Programs.
Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about this handbook.

Please return this page to:
Alberta Learning,
Special Programs Branch
8th Floor,
44 Capital Boulevard
10044 - 108 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 3S7
Fax: 780–422–2039

1. This handbook contains relevant information that I can use for planning and implementing programs for students in Outreach Programs.
   O strongly agree O agree O disagree O strongly disagree

COMMENTS

_____

_____

_____

2. This handbook is well organized and easy to read and use.
   O strongly agree O agree O disagree O strongly disagree

COMMENTS

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3. The information and strategies in this handbook are practical.
   O strongly agree O agree O disagree O strongly disagree

COMMENTS

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4. The information in this handbook enhanced my understanding of Outreach Programs.
   O strongly agree O agree O disagree O strongly disagree

COMMENTS

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5. We welcome your comments and suggestions for future Alberta Learning resources.

COMMENTS

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